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INTRODUCTION. TRANSNATIONAL EXOPOLITIES

Politics in post-Soviet migration

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DOSSIER

POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET MIGRATION

TRANSNATIONAL EXOPOLITIES

POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET MIGRATION

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The long history of emigration from the Russian empire and the Soviet Union has been consistently political in nature. It was mostly governed by political decisions and events, irrespective of whether those migrating were explicitly engaged in political action, embroiled in it by default (e.g. because of class or ethnic belonging), or randomly affected by large-scale political upheavals, such as revolution or war. What is more, politics was never confined simply to the cause or motivation for departure; living elsewhere (especially in the context of the Cold War) remained political as such—it carried with it a politically significant relationship to the country left behind, again, regardless of whether this involved overt forms of political engagement abroad or nothing of the sort.

The collapse of the USSR—another momentous political development—instigated a further massive movement of people, much of it “ethnic”, much of it within the territory of the former Union, or else a continuation of earlier ethnic waves to the West, such as the German or the Jewish, which had begun in the Soviet period (de Tinguy, 2004; Rainer & Rainer, 2003; Brubaker, 1998). However, by the mid-1990s, observers started to speak of the “normalization” of processes of migration from the former Soviet area, by which was meant principally this migration’s de-politicization (Polian, 2005). From this point on, the vast majority of those departing from the region were seen as doing so of their own free will and for broadly economic reasons, essentially in search of a better life elsewhere—a move which in itself did not carry ideological connotations as it had done in Soviet times.

Initially, during the 1990s, migration from the former Soviet area was akin to the movement of people from less to more developed parts of the world. During the early 2000s, however, as some parts of the region became more prosperous thanks to growing oil or gas revenues, and others became integrated into the European Union, patterns of migration from what was once the USSR appeared to “normalize” even further, becoming an integral part of the global interconnectivity of goods and capital, labour and expertise, typical of the early twenty-first century.

For sure, political emigration from the region did not vanish completely. There were, and still are, opposition activists, those affected by conflicts in the region, and others fearing persecution who are forced to flee abroad and claim political asylum. Moreover, many emigrating for economic or professional reasons can be heard rationalizing their move, at least in part, by invoking politics at some level, for example by critiquing growing authoritarianism, corruption or discrimination in their native country, even when they themselves might not have been directly affected by these. Indeed, reasons for migration are always multiple and complex, and migrants are likely to present the context of their migration differently in different situations. Nonetheless, the dominant narrative remains that, when it comes to framing migration in the post-Soviet era, politics matters less than economics.

While this might be true if migration is viewed in terms of what drives the overall flows and determines the trajectories of human mobility, it is hardly accurate if one considers migration more broadly, as a phenomenon that does not end with the physical move of people from one part of the world to another, but continues in the distinctive, transnational, character of migrant existence—in the social positions, roles and experiences that migrants, as such, have and perform; in the ways migrants interconnect with each other, self-organize and form communities; in the nature of the relationships they establish with their state of origin or the receiving society; in the ways in which they are able or not to influence the politics of these states (Bauböck, 2003; Sheffer, 1986).

Few need reminding that the economically-driven exponential rise in global migrancy has turned migration into the hottest political issue of the early twenty-first century—a phenomenon capable of causing seismic shifts in long-established political structures and values, notably those of Western

liberal democracies. However, what has proved especially important for understanding the political nature of specifically post-Soviet migration is that increased migration flows from and within the region at the start of the new century have produced a critical mass of migrants which have started to both self-mobilize and be mobilized by different agents in all sorts of politically significant ways in a wide range of different contexts. What is more, these new mobilizations do not include only the most recent migrants but also representatives of earlier migration waves, as well as their descendants, at least there where these maintain identifications and solidarity with their parents' or grandparents' ethno-national origins to a sufficient degree to be mobilized in this way (Bronnikova, 2014).

The consequence of this has been the crystallization, during the first couple of decades of the twenty-first century, of a field of transnational politics that is made up of politically significant mobilizations of those who have migrated from different parts of the former Soviet Union to a range of different destinations in a whole variety of circumstances. It is important to flag the relative novelty of the field in question in the context of the longer history of emigration from the former Soviet Union and previously the Russian empire. Indeed, to grasp the nature of this field in the twenty-first century, one cannot rely on conceptualizations of politics in emigration from earlier periods—for example, the politics of communities in exile (e.g. the formation of the post-revolutionary “Russia Abroad”; cf. Breuillard, 1994; Gousseff & Pichon-Bobrinckoy, 2005; Gousseff, 2008) or the politics of late-Soviet ethnic repatriation (Jewish or German, for instance). For sure, this earlier history of migration can still be vital to understanding aspects of contemporary politics among certain post-Soviet communities abroad (for instance, when comparing the “memory work” of Russian Germans and Russian Jews in present-day Germany; or when analysing conceptions of “homeland” among contemporary diasporic youth of Armenian descent, depending on whether they have grown up in the USA or Russia). However, the field of transnational politics that has formed around these populations in the twenty-first century is not reducible to the politics of these past migrations.

Arguably the most significant political development since the 2000s has been the more concerted drive to mobilize post-Soviet migrants into specific politically-significant “diasporas”. Some of this mobilization was initiated through the work of entrepreneurial individuals seeking to capitalize socially

or economically on the much-enlarged populations of fellow migrants from the same part of the world, speaking the same language and sharing the same cultural background. However, twenty-first-century “diasporizations” of post-Soviet migrants would not have become so political or assumed the degree of institutional organization that they have without being also driven and supported by state actors. Crucially, though, what one is dealing with here is never a single project of converting a given migrant body into some unitary “diaspora”. Rather, these are numerous (sometimes overlapping, often rival) diasporization projects (Brubaker, 2005), running in parallel and being driven by different political agents (state and non-state; grass-roots and those external to the “diaspora” itself), with a range of different objectives, agendas and resources.

The most studied example of an attempt to construct a “diasporic” body, specifically as an instrument serving the interests of a state, is the Russian Federation’s initiative to build a global network of so-called “compatriots abroad” (de Tinguy, 2010; Byford, 2012; Tkach, 2017; Bronnikova, 2014). Such a strategy was originally forged in the mobilization not of migrants but of ethnic Russians living in other former Soviet republics, and this specifically as a way of maintaining influence in the region (Kolstoe, 1995; 1999; Laruelle, 2006, 2008). However, in the mid-2000s, this strategy was extended to would-be “compatriots” living further afield, in Europe, Israel and beyond, with somewhat different international relations objectives in mind. Aside from Russia, Central Asian and Baltic states are today also active and innovative in engaging their nationals based abroad (Dzenovska, 2013; 2015; see also Kluczevska & Korneev in this issue).

Thus, a whole new sector of state action focused on building relationships with “diasporas” has been created in the former Soviet area, in line with related activities by other states across the world (Gamlen, 2008, 2010). Powerful non-governmental organizations interested in promoting transnational trade and development are also lending their support to this process, especially in situations where the post-Soviet state is relatively poor (which is the case with some of the Transcaucasian or Central Asian states, as discussed by Darieva and Kluczevska & Korneev in this special issue; see also Hohmann *et al.*, 2014).

The second decade of the twenty-first century then saw the emergence of some very different forms of politicization of the growing post-Soviet migrant populations. Significant political turbulence was generated in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash, which directly or indirectly destabilized many parts of the world, including the former Soviet area. The early 2010s gave rise to unprecedented anti-government protests in Russia in the form of the campaign for “fair elections”, following evidence of corruption and electoral fraud between the Russian Duma elections at the end of 2011 and the country’s presidential elections in Spring 2012. This campaign had a significant international element from the start and soon produced a vocal transnational protest movement across the globally dispersed Russophone communities, members of which came to believe, if only for a brief while, that this might be their chance to influence political change in Russia (Bronnikova, 2014; Kliuchnikova, 2013; Mustafina, 2014; see also Morgunova & Byford in this issue).

Diasporic groups also mobilized in response to the 2013–14 revolution in Ukraine, creating the international Euromaidan movement in support of Ukraine’s westward turn (Malyutina, 2016; Korniyuchuk, Patalong & Steinberg, 2017). However, Russia’s prompt appropriation of Crimea and the ensuing conflict in eastern Ukraine resulted in serious polarizations within post-Soviet migrant communities in the West (Bronnikova, 2016). The late 2010s have seen a radical transformation of patterns of connectivity among the wider “Russophone” migrant networks built during the 2000s on the basis of ethnically mixed post-Soviet migrant populations. The question of “patriotism” has become a major, and contentious, issue in the way post-Soviet migrants are now expected to position themselves in the complex transnational environments that they occupy.

The above are just the most eye-catching examples of the politicization of the post-Soviet migrant field during the first couple of decades of the twenty-first century. They express, in broad brush strokes, some of the general trends that one can observe. So far, these processes have been studied principally by political scientists interested in international relations, whose analysis has, for this reason, prioritized the undeniably important role that states, as powerful political agents, have assumed in actively shaping this area of transnational politics. The focus of such studies has been mostly the strategies and actions that states adopt vis-à-vis migrant communities as

key targets of political influence, and the way that migrants might then be responding to them.

There is, however, far more to this field of transnational politics which has formed around post-Soviet migrants since the turn of the century. In order to fully grasp its stakes, it is important not to limit analysis only to certain, highly significant, but often narrowly defined, sets of problems—such as the aforementioned interactions between states and diasporas or the successes and failures of transnational protest movements. In framing this special issue, our position has been that the study of mobilizations that make up the field of transnational politics around post-Soviet migrant and diasporic populations requires a broader definition of “the political”. Indeed, activism that is motivated by, say, promoting a national or ethnic culture abroad; or that is engaged in building a support community of co-ethnics or co-nationals in emigration; or that fosters cross-border ethno-national connections to further some business interests; or that encourages philanthropic investment and civic participation from the diaspora—all need to be included as at least potentially relevant, since these mobilizations will most probably at some point become enrolled into, or even from the very start be developed as, elements of larger projects that are either explicitly political or that eventually acquire political significance.

For example, the contribution to this issue by Viimaranta, Protassova & Mustajoki, which deals with the question of Russophones in Finland, examines in some detail the complex politicizations of the Russian language and education in this country. The contribution by Darieva, which looks at the case of the international Armenian diaspora, analyses forms of ethnic volunteer work as ways in which diasporic youth, long-removed from migrant origins, seek to reconnect with a purported diasporic “homeland”. What is important here, of course, is that each of these analyses brings out, contextualizes and interprets the specific political dimensions of such mobilizations. This applies even in situations where the actors involved (whether those who are being mobilized or those who are doing the mobilizing) insist on their lack of interest in “politics” as such.

While the political field that we are interested in is historically new, this special issue is not, of course, the first attempt at examining it, either in the broader international context or specifically with reference to migrants from

the former Soviet area (cf. Nikolko & Carment, 2017). However, explorations of this field to date remain fraught with certain limitations. Detailed empirical studies of specific post-Soviet migrant communities are very likely to closely analyse the politics surrounding these communities, especially in high profile situations (e.g. Ukrainians since 2013–14). However, they do not generally define these processes as part of a wider field of transnational politics that surrounds twenty-first-century post-Soviet migration as such. Some of the more systematic comparative approaches focused on the political usually of necessity limit themselves to certain very specific sets of political issues (such as the interest that states might have in their diasporas; cf. Dufoix *et al.*, 2010). Both approaches thereby potentially reduce some of the richness of the political field in question and either risk constraining the diversity of the ways and contexts in which the political is being enacted here or do not bring out sufficiently strongly the inherent relatedness of seemingly very disparate cases of politics in post-Soviet migration that can at first glance look like entirely different kinds of enactment of the political.

Our own ambition in this special issue is to minimize the reduction of the complexity of the field in question, without, however, at the same time, fragmenting this field into a series of case studies that have little to do with one another. In each case presented here, the stakes and agendas, the actors and their relationships, the contexts of their mobilizations and the meanings of their actions, will indeed be very different. For this reason, these cases are not meant to be “compared” in a straightforward sense of this word. Nevertheless, it is still possible—and, we argue, necessary—to conceptualize these different cases as part of the same field of transnational politics created over the last couple of decades around migrant and diasporic populations originating in the geopolitical area that was once the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. Instead of “comparing”, though, what we are prompting the reader of this special issue to do is to strategically *juxtapose* our selection of cases, which otherwise involve different post-Soviet states and nationalities (Russian, Armenian, Tajik), and different trajectories and sites of migration (UK and Finland). Furthermore, rather than posit in advance a deductively constructed framework for defining what “politics in post-Soviet migration” should mean, our aim is to consider how we might start to look *inductively* for partial generalizations, arrived at precisely by means of said juxtaposition.

The articles that make up this special issue have mutually overlapping elements that are useful to juxtapose and relate, compare and contrast. While “Russian-speakers in Finland: The Ambiguities of a Growing Minority” by Viimaranta, Protassova & Mustajoki focus on the complex ways in which particular Russian-speaking migrant groups define themselves and/or are being defined *in the political context of the receiving country* (namely Finland respectively), Oksana Morgunova and Andy Byford’s “Between Neo-nationalizing Russia and Brexit Britain: The Dilemmas of Migrants’ Political Mobilisations” examines, instead, the ways in which migrants’ distinctive transnational positioning shapes their mobilizations as political agents *in-between the politics of the sending and the receiving state* (Russia on one side and Britain on the other). The other two contributions—Darieva’s “Discovering ‘Homeland’: A New Generation of Armenian Diasporic Organizations” and “Politics in the Tajik Emigrant Community Complex” by Kluczevska and Korneev—demonstrate, in contrasting ways, how the politics of émigré or diasporic communities *impacts back on the wider politics of post-Soviet states* (Armenia and Tajikistan respectively).

As should be clear from this limited line-up, we are not aiming for systematic or representative coverage. There are, indeed, many other cases that would be perfect candidates for a special issue on the topic of “politics in post-Soviet migration”, yet which we did not include for entirely contingent reasons. Major examples here would be the extensive political activity of Russian communities in Israel (Remennick, 2012) or the already mentioned recent politicization of the Ukrainian diaspora in the wake of the ratcheting up of tensions between Ukraine and Russia during the 2010s. However, what we are hoping to achieve in this special issue is not to reach definitive conclusions, but, much more modestly, *to start a conversation*.

By juxtaposing the above illustrative and contrasting case studies we seek to:

- a) draw attention to the complexity and heterogeneity of this field of transnational political mobilizations of migrant and diasporic populations from the former Soviet space in the twenty-first century;
- b) argue that what we are dealing with here is, to a certain degree, a new kind of political field that, as such, demands closer scrutiny with a fresh pair of eyes;

c) show that, while this field's complexity lies in the diversity of political mobilizations which are not directly related or easy to compare, these different empirical cases benefit from being analysed as part of a common field; and finally,

d) start to develop a framework of observation and analysis that allows us to reach a better synthetic understanding of this field in all its diversity.

Crucial to conceptualizing this field as a field of transnational politics (i.e. politics made up of relations that in one way or another stretch across state borders) is that it is focused on migrant or diasporic populations as key "supports" (*points d'appui*) of mobilizing action and interaction. In order to conceptually frame this field of transnational politics focused on migrants, we find it useful to borrow and adapt the term "exopolity" (*exopolitie*) from Stéphane Dufoix (2002). Dufoix developed this notion with reference to the field of political action in emigration typical of the Cold War era, looking at Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish émigré populations. We have lifted this term out of this historical and political context and have transposed it onto the field of twenty-first-century transnational political mobilizations of migrants and diasporans from the states that once formed the Soviet Union.

To conceptualize this field of politics as "transnational" does not mean that this is politics that somehow transcends nation-states—i.e. that is external to or independent from state politics, that operates in kinds of "interstices" between nation-states. The field in question is an arena of political activity that is still fully embedded in state politics and politics between states, both sending and receiving, "home" and "host". What also needs to be borne in mind, though, is that, when it comes to the former Soviet area, what "home state" actually means can be rather ambiguous. *Imaginaries of "homeland"* often play a more important role than actual "home states". Darieva's contribution to this special issue is directly concerned with how the different imaginaries of the Armenian diaspora relate to the Republic of Armenia's own nation-construction. Homeland imaginaries are, however, also relevant to other cases. In particular, homeland imaginaries of "Russophone" migrant networks in the West often include versions of the former USSR (Byford, 2009).

When we refer to "transnational *exopolities*", the "ex" in this neologism does not signify something that is "external" (i.e. placed "outside"). Rather,

what we have in mind here is politics that through concrete migrant populations *ex-tends* ethnic, national or, indeed, neo-imperial politics into what is, in fact, a post-ethnic, post-national and post-imperial situation—a situation in which the politics surrounding the decline of state sovereignty has become particularly ambiguous (Brown, 2010). In this context, “diaspora” becomes one important political form and means of mobilization that does the job of extending ethnic, national and imperial politics beyond and across state borders. Through such extension, the ethnic, the national and the imperial persist, but are repositioned, acquiring atypical forms in new, transnational, constellations. At the centre of these constellations are migrant populations defined by their cross-border displacement and transnational positioning.

In this context, the concepts of nationhood and ethnicity no longer seem to conform to the same semantic or conceptual rules as before. What exactly is implied in contemporary constructions of “Russian-speakers” in Finland as a “minority”? What is the polity to which Russians currently living in the UK should identify with? What might be the relationship between the former USSR, the Russian Federation, a fluid set of “Russophone” communities worldwide, and a constructed network of Russia’s “compatriots”? What is the meaning of the enrolment of “global Armenians” into a series of different projects of nation-building that are ongoing in the former Soviet Republic of Armenia? How should one conceptualize the politics of Tajik statehood when it is being established between Tajik state structures, a network of politically active but heterogeneous emigrant communities in Russia and elsewhere, and a large body of economically deprived and apolitical transient labour migrants?

Similar questions can, of course, be asked of contemporary migrant populations and diasporas the world over. However, the history and geopolitics of the former Soviet area is sufficiently specific for us to construe the field of transnational politics that has formed around migrant populations from this area as a distinct and distinctive object of analysis. For sure, given the number of states involved, the geography of transnational politics that we are assembling here is complicated. Further complexity is added by the longer history of migrations from and within this area, with different waves of different groups to different destinations displaying very different characteristics.

Indeed, even when one is looking at some specific post-Soviet migrant population in one concrete host country, what one is usually dealing with is a group that is geographically dispersed, socio-economically fragmented, often ethnically heterogeneous, and also divided in terms of period and circumstance of migration (with members of different migrant waves and categories often perceiving one another as inherently different). For this reason, as every one of the case studies in this special issue illustrates, it is not possible to speak of a “diaspora” or “migrant body” in the singular. And yet, it is the task of each individual case-study analysis to provide a picture of what relevant divisions pertain to a given “emigrant community complex” (as Kluczevska & Korneev call it), and what exact role different parts of this “complex” assume in the political field in which they are embedded.

That said, the historical and political interrelatedness of the states and populations in question—and, crucially, the interrelatedness of ethno-national, imperial or diasporic projects, claims, frameworks and identities that they entail—justify (and we would say, necessitate) placing these different cases alongside one another. This interrelatedness also applies to the various imaginary political geographies that different actors in and from the former Soviet space carve up as their shared perspective on the world. These imaginaries are important because they are often the ones shaping these actors’ political visions, strategies and actions. A well-known example here would be the Russian state imaginary of the “near” vs. the “far abroad”—namely the differentiation in contemporary Russia’s foreign relations between the former Soviet zone and the zone beyond it. Yet today this division (an inheritance from the construction of the former Eastern bloc as buffer between the USSR and the Iron Curtain) is not as neat as it sometimes appears to be. For instance, the status of the Baltic states is distinctive, since they are now members of both the EU and NATO, while still being conceptualized by Russia as part of the “near abroad”, given their relatively large ethnic Russian populations. What is more, the Northern Caucasus, while part of the Russian Federation, has also been framed as the “inner abroad” (Toal, 2017).

The “near abroad” imaginary can, moreover, partially overlap with imaginaries of “imperial borderlands”. As such, these “borderlands” can include, for instance, Finland, which was never deemed part of the “near abroad”, although it had been part of the Russian empire, directly borders Russia, and has consequently developed a set of unique relationships with Russia that

affect political negotiations around both “Russians in Finland” and “Finns in Russia” (cf. Viimaranta, Protassova & Mustajoki in this issue). Needless to say, there are also geopolitical imaginaries in the former Soviet area that do not include Russia as regional centre. This includes the aforementioned homeland imaginaries shaping the relationship between the Republic of Armenia and the global Armenian diaspora (cf. Darieva in this issue).

A much more recent political imaginary through which ethnicity, nationhood and empire are extended and repositioned transnationally is the notion of the “Russian World” (*Russkii Mir*). This concept is actively promoted by Russian state ideologues and structures, weaponizing certain definitions of “Russian culture” as a political resource in international relations (Tkach, 2017; Audinet, 2017). Yet this imaginary is rivalled and challenged by other projects of “global Russianness”, notably those of elite Russian émigré groups who have created their own socio-cultural niches in the Western world (including parts of the “near abroad”, such as the Baltic states) and who propose alternative concepts of “Russianness outside Russia” in which “Russian culture” is placed in an emphatically “cosmopolitan” framework (Platt, 2018).

It is important to note here, however, that such “globalist” projects are still interlocked with the politics of post-Soviet states. This is not only because states remain a key locus of the political, even in what is a highly globalized world, but also because post-Soviet states are actively placing themselves in this transnational political arena, precisely by trying to engage with the migrant and diasporic populations in question. That said, not all states in the former Soviet region are equal to the task. For example, as discussed by Darieva in this special issue, the “weakness” of the Armenian state becomes significant in its interactions with wealthy diasporic groups based in more advanced economies. In that case, we see a far greater involvement of NGOs, both those generated within the diaspora itself, but also influential supra-national organizations (such as the World Bank), which position themselves as consultants, advising the weaker states on how to engage “their” diasporas as part of a wider agenda of stimulating global economic growth and infrastructural development where this is not happening spontaneously. However, what such efforts amount to in practice, i.e. how transnational politics end up unfolding between states and diasporas in each concrete case, is precisely what needs to be explored in greater detail.

What is especially important to note here, however, is that the “game” of transnational politics around migrant populations requires sending states to *extend themselves*, as it were, beyond their sovereign boundaries, to change their modus operandi and even their very “natures”. When moving outside its own borders in order to reach out to populations in the diaspora (which a state might claim as its legitimate constituency) a state transforms itself as a political agent. It needs to rethink its strategies and tactics, to improvise relatively new, non-traditional instruments and techniques, and also to present itself in very different, much more ambiguous guises. Different states do this differently—some adapt for this purpose particular forms of soft power and cultural diplomacy; others focus on encouraging business investment and trade; others adopt forms of transnational repression as a means of stifling political opposition in exile; and many states do all three at the same time (as seems to be the case with Tajikistan in the analysis of Kluczevska & Korneev).

One must not forget that receiving states are also likely to become embroiled in the transnational complexities involved. The body politic of the receiving state is transformed by populations perceived as “incoming” and states consequently develop policies and practices to manage this in one way or another. However, the incoming populations do not easily conform to any simple categorization: there is nothing straightforward or neutral about a particular migrant population being framed as “migrants” or “minorities” or “exiles” or “refugees” or “repatriates” or “diasporans” or “expats”. In the case of post-Soviet migrant populations, these categories can end up morphing one into the other depending on the continually changing political context (as is clear in the contributions by Morgunova & Byford for the UK and Viimaranta, Protassova & Mustajoki for Finland).

Furthermore, the fact that these populations can be claimed by the sending state as simultaneously belonging to another body politic means that the receiving state also enters, via this population, into a more complicated relationship with the sending state. The case of Turkish migrant populations in the Netherlands and Germany becoming in 2017 targets of Turkish electoral campaigning, or indeed of spying and surveillance, is but one extreme example. The case of Russian migrant populations becoming targets of mobilization into loyal “compatriots” or into a protest movement against

the regime “back home”, would be another (as discussed in the contribution by Morgunova & Byford to this special issue).

However, as the case studies presented here demonstrate, states are usually neither the only nor necessarily the central players in this complex political playing field that develops around migrants. Other participants include professionally organized NGOs and commercially motivated organizations (consultancies and media agencies especially). Moreover, because this field forces states to operate beyond their usual domain of power, they cannot but descend into what is no-longer their comfort-zone—an arena where migrants, both as individuals or in some organized form, can more easily circumvent hegemonic discourses (which does not, of course, mean that ideologies favoured and promoted by states are not often willingly assimilated and propagated by migrants).

The way in which post-Soviet emigrant populations mobilize in politically significant ways in this transnational arena is inevitably much more haphazard, much less strategic than what states or professional organizations do. In fact, political mobilization in emigration is neither guaranteed nor even the norm. The ways and means through which particular groups mobilize will vary hugely. Platforms for activism in emigration are limited and, on the whole, unstable. As most of the contributions in this special issue demonstrate, they are tied to specific, temporary, “opportunity structures” (see especially the contribution by Morgunova & Byford). As a result, political mobilization in the diaspora is usually of a social movement type and thus impermanent.

The cases presented in this special issue demonstrate just how diverse and complex these mobilizations can be and how important it is to study each case in its individuality. At the same time, the “transnational exopolities” that form in this way are defined not only by the relatively narrow set of interests, stakes and actions specific to each case, but also by the broader pattern of transnational politics pertaining to the geopolitical chronotope that goes by the name “post-Soviet migration”. What this special issue hopes to bring to the table is a new lens through which the evolution of this complex field of transnational politics between the late 1990s and the late 2010s can be re-examined.

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